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BASKETBALL 2014-15



DTH/KATIE WILLIAMS

North Carolina women's basketball coach Sylvia Hatchell will coach her first regular season game this afternoon after missing the entire 2013-14 basketball season to undergo treatments for leukemia.

A coach, a stranger and the other end of the rope

By Dylan Howlett
Senior Writer

This is a parable. Something about a basketball team finding its way. Or is it?

Think a little bigger. Wander off the court, and picture this: You're dangling from the edge of a cliff with a 20,000-foot abyss. There's not much choice here. Fall to your death or look up and see the one person you'd ever want to see holding a rope, and your life. They will ignore the burn, the blood oozing from their palms, because devotion has no price.

Wait. Don't put your trust in only a soul or two. The collective, you see, overwhelms the strength of one man or woman. It's Herculean. So you want five, a dozen, a whole team to hold your rope and never let go. To be there for missed free throws and bad turnovers, yes, but also for more, for when forces unseen upend your life.

For when you get cancer, say. When, as the story behooves, you "Hold the Rope."

"I appreciate my friends so much," said Sylvia Hatchell, now in her 29th year as head coach of the North Carolina women's basketball team — and her first since her cancer went into remission. "A lot of people don't have the support system that I have. And there's no way I could have done it without 'em."

But this bigger-than-basketball lesson? She understood it before, as Hatchell calls it, a tsunami named acute myeloid leukemia, with its 65-percent remission rate for patients her age, knocked her sideways by way of an 8:20 p.m. phone call to her Chapel Hill home on Friday,

Oct. 11, 2013. Before she trudged through four rounds of chemo — "You actually feel like a Mack truck has hit you" — at the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, each punctuated by a "rock bottom," Hatchell said, that felt far deeper than a metaphorical 20,000-foot dive.

Before she dropped to the court and hammered out pushups at a recent 6 a.m. practice — weeks after a bone marrow biopsy declared her cancer free — because she was so jazzed about a play that went, unlike the tsunami, according to plan. Before Hatchell will return, after a season-long hiatus, to the Carmichael Arena sidelines this afternoon for UNC's season opener.

"Every day, I'm just like, 'Oh, God, it's so beautiful outside,'" said Hatchell, 62, a 2013 Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame inductee and the winningest active coach in women's basketball. "Even if it's cold and everybody talks about how dreary it is outside, I say, 'No, no, no. It is gorgeous. It's beautiful. Hey, I'm here, I'm healthy. I'm with these kids. I'm at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. No, no. Life is great.'"

The rope-holding that took place during Hatchell's six-month recovery? The blisters are everywhere. She never spent a night alone from Oct. 11, 2013 to April 17, always in the company of her husband, Sammy, a women's basketball associate head coach at Raleigh's Shaw University, or her son, Van, the 25-year-old managing director of the Chapel Hill nonprofit Extraordinary Ventures. Friends from the Smoky Mountains, her shag club and her hometown of Gastonia — they were there,

too. She still has voicemails on her iPhone from Roy Williams, Mike Krzyzewski, former Gov. Bev Perdue, Pat Summitt, Robin Roberts. And an avalanche of get-well sentiments from strangers, because the rope snakes far beyond her living room.

But the fear? That never subsides.

You must hold tighter. "In the back of my mind, I always felt she was going to get through it," Sammy Hatchell said. "I always had faith in God and faith in her. I thought if anybody could do it, she could do it. But you know that God lets good people die, too, and so you're afraid, scared, petrified.

"That punch-in-the-gut feeling will persist," he said. "I can still feel it if I think about it."

When, two days after her diagnosis, her team gathered at the Lineberger Center to hear the news straight from her masked lips, Hatchell placed a blue and white rope before them on a conference room table. Some players were inconsolable, others stone-faced. Xylina McDaniel folded into the arms of teary-eyed interim coach Andrew Calder, Hatchell's assistant for 29 seasons. You've got to help the others get through this, he told the then-sophomore forward. You've got to hold the other end.

"It's an inspirational story, and you take it to heart," McDaniel said, "but when you're finally hit with a situation where you actually have to Hold the Rope for someone, it makes a lot more sense, and you take it to heart more. You live by that."

SEE SYLVIA HATCHELL, PAGE 8



DTH FILE/JOHANNA FEREBEE

Coach Sylvia Hatchell was diagnosed with leukemia Oct. 11, 2013 just two and a half weeks before the start of the 2013-14 women's basketball season. The Hall of Fame coach is now cancer free.

‘Second-half Marcus’ not the only option

With UNC's newfound depth, Paige will have help carrying the load.

By Grace Raynor
Sports Editor

Marcus Paige's mind wanders. But forgive him, he can't help it. It's been roaming for a while now. At least since 8:58 p.m. on March 24, the night he told the world via Twitter that he'd suit up for his junior season at North Carolina.

When he's not thinking about Poli 101: State and Local Government or fixated on his next pass in FIFA 15, Marcus begins to daydream.

It's here when Paige's imagination gets the best of him, daring

him to answer his own questions about what could be.

"I find myself thinking about the end of ACC play and March and the tournament all the time," he said. "It's hard not to think about the potential of the team, especially because we're a team that hasn't accomplished things that a normal, typical North Carolina group of players would accomplish."

The team? Maybe not. Paige himself? Now that's a different story. The Marion, Iowa-native has meticulously refined his craft since he was old enough to understand grown-up talk at the dinner table.

"He's kind of come from a coaching family. His mom coached in a state championship game in Iowa. So he sat at the table and listened to all the coach talk," North Carolina men's basketball coach Roy Williams

said. "He sat there and listened to people talk about individuals doing the best you can do. And yet he sat there and listened to them about how what the team does is most important. He understands that."

Now as a junior, coming off of a breakout sophomore campaign that saw him average a team-high 17.5 points per game and rack up myriad awards, it's Paige's duty to pass this same message along to his teammates.

Last season, it had to be all about him. Now that's not the case. "I don't think the team's going to have to rely on me as much this year," said the ACC's Preseason Player of the Year in October. "I do need to be productive and one of the lead guys on the team. But I don't

SEE MARCUS PAIGE, PAGE 8

Brice Johnson bulks up to take on starter's role

The junior UNC forward has gained 40 pounds since his freshman year.

By Aaron Dodson
Senior Writer

Temptation has gotten the best of Brice Johnson in recent months. He might as well be a freshman, eyes wide at the all-you-can-eat buffets of college dining halls and endless desserts piled into self-service drawer stations.

Only during Johnson's freshman year, he had no interest in picking up the 'Freshman 15.'

Since then, North Carolina men's basketball coach Roy Williams has challenged Johnson to bulk up his lanky, 6-foot-9 frame.

So now, the junior forward jumps at every chance he gets to eat a little extra.

He's 40 pounds heavier than his freshman self: 228 pounds and counting.

"I'm eating a lot more than I would have my freshman year," Johnson said. "Freshman year, I ate a lot but I didn't eat as much as I do now. I can't stop eating for some reason. Sometimes I just catch myself eating a cream

SEE BRICE JOHNSON, PAGE 8

“Enjoy the game.”
MICHAEL JORDAN

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The new kids on the block bring their Hall of Fame coach to the ACC.



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PEOPLE TO WATCH

UNC FRESHMEN

The North Carolina men’s basketball team has the benefit of adding the nation’s No. 7 recruiting class, according to Scout.com. Every recruit — two five-star recruits and one four-star — should find time on the court despite an extremely deep, well-rounded team.

Theo Pinson



Theo Pinson could be the flashiest player of this year’s class. He brings a playing style, athleticism and physical frame comparable to junior forward J.P. Tokoto — turns out, he can dunk like him as well.

The five-star forward/guard won the Elite 24 dunk contest in 2013 and has already showcased that ability in UNC’s exhibitions.

Against Fayetteville State, Pinson had 15 points and eight rebounds. “Theo was Theo,” said Coach Roy Williams after the game. “You know, four turnovers or whatever it was and yet he makes a lot of things happen: offensive rebounds, made a couple (3-point shots).”

Pinson has shown the ability to do numerous things up and down the court, and followed up his first exhibition game with an equally impressive showing against Belmont Abbey: seven points, four assists, three steals and three rebounds.

And don’t forget the dunks.

Joel Berry II



The biggest unknown in this year’s class might be Joel Berry II, simply because his playing time could be the most limited.

With a surplus of point guards, playing time at the 1 and 2 positions will be at a premium.

Still, at 6 feet and 195 pounds, the four-star guard brings a bulldog mentality to the guard position that compliments the games of Marcus Paige and Nate Britt.

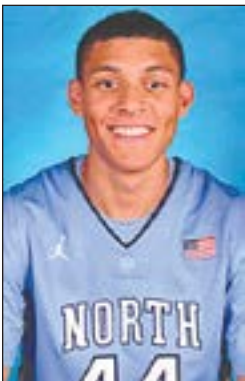
He showed his ability to drive the lane and get into the paint in his first exhibition against Fayetteville State, where he led the team with six free throws on seven trips to the line.

In addition to getting to the line, Berry has shown he can be a playmaker, with nine assists in his first two exhibition games.

“Joel can shoot it, too,” said Marcus Paige after the Fayetteville State game.

That’s one area of Berry’s game that we haven’t seen yet in Chapel Hill. He is just 1-for-6 from deep so far this season.

Justin Jackson



The 6-foot-8 forward/guard from Tomball, Texas, has made the biggest impact of this freshman class so far.

After getting the starting nod on the wing against Fayetteville State, Jackson proceeded to lead UNC with 18 points.

In the next exhibition game, Jackson — rated the No. 10 recruit in the 2014 class by Scout.com — led the Tar Heels in scoring again, finishing with 18 points while converting three of four 3-pointers.

“You know I’ve seen him play a lot guys, I mean he came to our camp as a seventh or eighth grader,” said Coach Roy Williams. “I’ve never seen him get frazzled, I’ve never seen him get frustrated.”

“He has a gift — the ball just sort of finds his hands, and he’s at the basket and there’s nobody guarding him and he lays it up.”

The top-ranked player of this class has shown his talent already. And it looks like he’s here to score.

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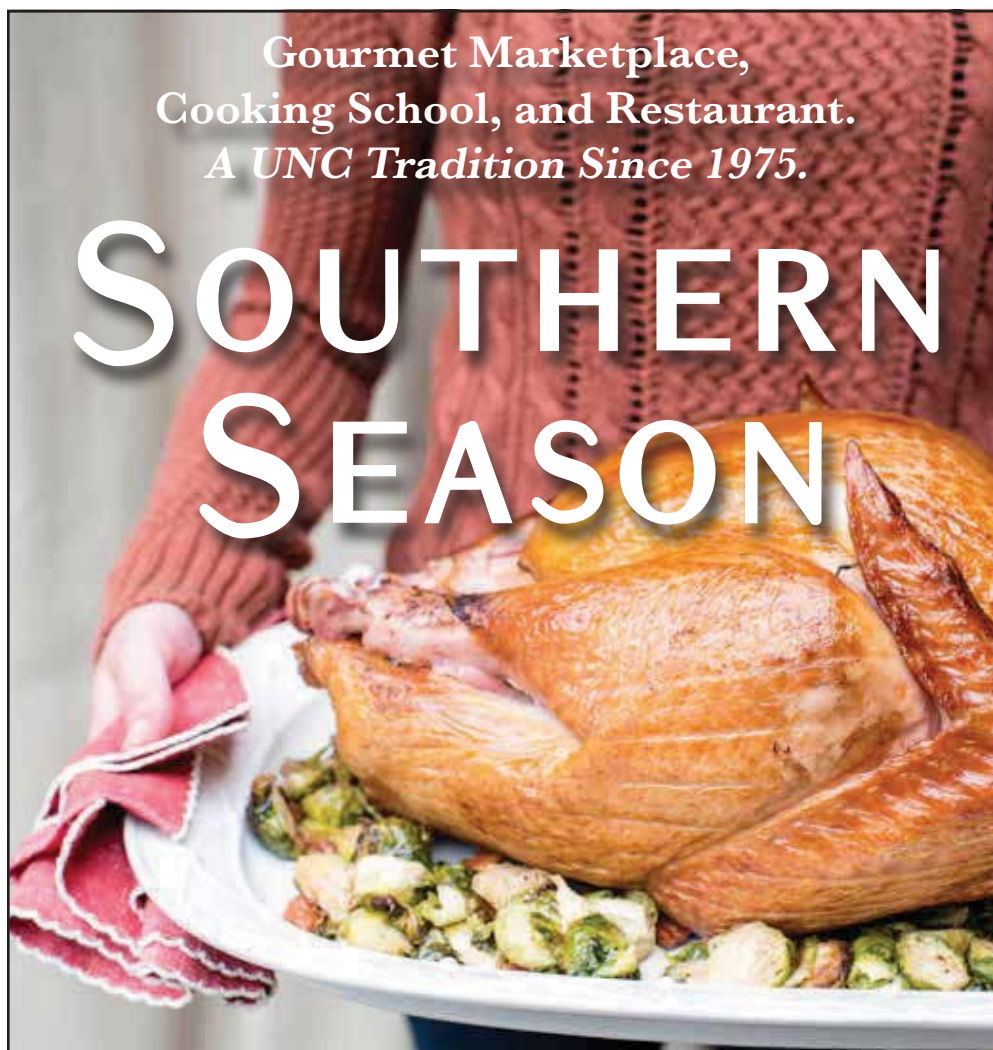
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No more hesitation for Hicks

By Brendan Marks
Assistant Sports Editor

Hesitation. Pivot or hook. Or pass. Maybe a jump shot. Isaiah Hicks thinks about it for a second during this summer practice. Rear end pressed up against the defender, he uses all of his 6-foot-8-inch frame to keep position. And then the defender pulls away. Timeout. He missed his chance. He hesitated. "He just needs to relax," Coach Roy Williams said at ACC media day. "It's a hard thing for somebody to say, 'Relax and play harder.' I mean, they don't exactly go together. "Relax and quit thinking — don't make those silly little mistakes." It's something Hicks has struggled with before. After being named 18th in the 2013 ESPN 100 — ahead of future first round NBA draft picks Tyler Ennis and Zach LaVine — Hicks arrived in Chapel

Hill to unrealistic expectations. Amid P.J. Hairston's suspension, Hicks was supposed to fill the void. He didn't. In fact, Hicks did the opposite. With Hairston's absence and James Michael McAdoo's presence at power forward, Hicks was forced out to the wing. Uncomfortable shooting from deep but never given a chance in the post, Hicks looked lost for most of 2013-14. The Oxford native — a five-star recruit and the 2013 Associated Press North Carolina Player of the Year — averaged a meager 1.2 points per game in just 7.3 minutes per contest. But then came the off-season. McAdoo's departure for the NBA draft effectively dubbed Brice Johnson the new starting power forward for the North Carolina men's basketball team. It also left the sixth man job up for grabs. Hicks made his best case over the summer. Back at power forward, he once again

began bullying defenders, just as he had in high school. "Being aggressive" is something coach always talked to me about," Hicks said. "Coach says, 'You've got to fit in the post, score — that's what you want the big men to do.'" To date, the switch has paid off. In UNC's first two exhibition games, Hicks has missed just one of his 14 shots en route to a combined 27 points. "He's a lot more comfortable with his play than he was when he was beating himself up," Johnson said. His performances against Fayetteville State and Belmont Abbey haven't clinched the sixth man spot yet. And while he likely will, his coach isn't ready to crown him just yet. "I don't know that he's gonna be the best player tomorrow," Williams said. But the rest of the season? "I think he'll be better." No hesitation.

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DTH FILE/KATIE WILLIAMS
Junior forward J.P. Tokoto scans the court in an exhibition game against Fayetteville State. Tokoto scored six points in the game.

New year, new role for Tokoto

By Daniel Wilco
Senior Writer

From third grade through the middle of sixth grade, J.P. Tokoto lived with his grandparents off and on. They were closer to his school in Rockford, Ill., and, more importantly, closer to his first love — soccer. Tokoto's grandfather, also Jean Pierre Tokoto, had played on the Cameroonian national soccer team in the early 1980s. In the '90s when he began to coach, naturally, his grandson began to play. Every day after school, the elder Jean Pierre would pick up the younger, grab a bite to eat and hit the road. The elder coached two teams, and the younger played with both. Practice was more than an hour away, so many nights were spent on long drives to and from the field, just the two J.P. Tokotos and lengthy stretches of highway. "My grandfather is a music guy, so any time I had a chance, I was putting on new music for him," Tokoto said. "Sometimes he'd say, 'Change it.' Sometimes he'd say, 'Play it again.'" But most of the time, on those long drives before and after practice, Tokoto slept. Now, nine years later, and

800 miles from his grandfather's home in Rockford, it's impossible to sleep on Tokoto. The 6-foot-6 junior forward has found his role on the star-studded No. 6 North Carolina men's basketball team. "Right now, I'm a facilitator." Tokoto's facilitating is best measured by the momentum litmus test that is UNC's bench. It's during the preseason exhibition games against opponents who could manage to get blown out by the Washington Generals where tedium can easily take hold and the bench's electricity can start to fade. Tokoto is the arch-nemesis of tedium. It's here where he resumes his relentless assault on the basket, where each new strike seems primed to rip the rim from its hinges. It's here where, on a fast break, he cocks the rock back until it touches the embroidered "TOKOTO" on his jersey as if to ensure the ball remembers his name before he slams it through the rim, knocking it unconscious and bringing life back to the Smith Center. It's here where the bench erupts, waving towels and throwing their hands on their heads, in utter shock and amazement.

It's here where the facilitator manufactures momentum. In sixth grade, Tokoto moved back to Wisconsin and was faced with a choice. He could find a new soccer team and play without his grandfather for the first time since he was 3 years old, or he could listen to his friend, C.J. Malone. Malone wanted to convince Tokoto to try out for a local AAU basketball team. Tokoto relented and tagged along. "I went, had a great time, loved it," he said. "I had to choose one or the other. I decided to focus on basketball." Recently, Tokoto has switched his focus again. It's another part of the facilitator — pass first, ask questions later. The turnover-prone Tokoto, who was second on the team in turnovers last year, worked on control all summer with Coach Hubert Davis. In two exhibition games this season, Tokoto has logged 14 assists and one turnover. That level of near-flawless distribution is essential for Coach Roy Williams' Usain-Bolt-esque transition game, and though he said Tokoto's performance so far has facilitated that tempo, there's room for improvement. "They still look like a Model

T. Ford out there compared to the way I want them to run," Williams said after UNC's 112-34 defeat of Belmont Abbey Nov. 7. "It's nowhere near where I want it to be, but I think we're going to get there." Defensively, the only UNC representative on the 2014 ACC All-Defensive Team has one thing in mind: "Create havoc like I did last year." Tokoto, who led UNC with 55 steals in the 2013-14 season, credits his defensive diligence to his years on the pitch and the quick feet that long hours of soccer practice gifted him. Still, despite these improvements, Tokoto realizes he's just one cog in the North Carolina machine that has its sights set as high as they can go. "If everything goes the way we want it to... I imagine this team going all the way to the championship," he said. "Coach has said that he sees we have the tools, we have the players, we have the atmosphere." All they need now is someone to bring it all together — a sparkplug when momentum is scarce and a bellows to stoke the fire when it's hot. They need a facilitator. They need Tokoto.

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Tigers lose top scorer 5 years running

By Joey DeVito
Assistant Online Editor

Clemson men's basketball coach Brad Brownell finally thought this would be the year — but he was wrong. Brownell was under the impression that his leading scorer, forward K.J. McDaniels, would return to the program. During Brownell's four-year tenure at Clemson, the Tigers have never returned their leading scorer from the previous season. But McDaniels, who would have been a senior this season, had other plans. The team leader in points, rebounds, steals and blocked shots decided to forgo his final collegiate season to play in the NBA, where he is currently a member of the Philadelphia 76ers, drafted in the second round with the 32nd overall pick in June's draft. "I mean, this is unbelievable — that we're five years in a row going without the leading scorer coming back," Brownell said. "I remember saying this last meeting that we probably have him back finally, but we don't." Brownell will now turn to two upperclassmen, senior point guard Rod Hall and junior center Landry Nnoko, to lead the Tigers to an NCAA Tournament berth that evaded them last year, and for the two years prior to that. Clemson hasn't made it to the NCAA Tournament since 2011. After missing the 2014 tournament, the Tigers played in the National Invitation Tournament and advanced three rounds before falling in the semifinal to Southern Methodist. This season, Nnoko brings two years of collegiate experi-



ence, but has only played organized basketball for five years. He picked up the game in high school after he moved to Orlando from Cameroon. "First time watching it, I just fell in love," Nnoko said. "My neighbor had a goal in his driveway, and I just started shooting with him and then he asked me if I wanted to start playing with his club. I was like, 'You know, why not?'" Coming to Clemson, Brownell said Nnoko's biggest problem wasn't his skill, but his confidence. "He's starting to feel good about himself," Brownell said. "And as he becomes more confident and a better player he'll get there, I just hope it's sometime this year." But as he enters his junior season, Nnoko feels it is his time to shine. "I definitely have to step up," Nnoko said. "There's three leaders on this team now — me, Rod and Damarcus (Harrison). We have to implant our defensive mindset into all the young players." Nnoko and Hall said they want this Clemson team to be known for its defensive intensity — just like last year. The Tigers took down Duke in 2013-14 behind a stifling effort from their defense — limiting the No. 1 scoring offense in the ACC to 59 points. "Defense has always been our key," Hall said. "The defense is going to take care of our offense." Hall said he knows that it will be tougher without McDaniels' play on both ends of the floor, but he is confident in the new team. "Yeah we're going to miss K.J.," he said. "But at the end of the day we're a different team and we got better over the year."

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Seminoles hungry to return to NCAA Tournament

By Chris Haney
Staff Writer

For junior guard Montay Brandon and the Florida State men's basketball team, the torment of the 2013-14 season still lingers. "It definitely hurt," Brandon said. "This summer we've worked hard with that one goal in mind, which is the NCAA Tournament." The Seminoles missed out on the tournament for the second consecutive year in 2013-14 and instead went to the National Invitation Tournament. FSU made a deep run in the NIT before losing to Minnesota in overtime of the semifinals. Thirteen-year coach Leonard Hamilton and the Seminoles will look to improve on the mediocre campaign that saw a 22-14, 9-9 ACC finish. Without a consistent defen-



sive effort, the squad instead was forced to outgun its opposition. Even with the second highest ACC 3-point percentage, the team struggled. Hamilton is expecting big offensive contributions from his four returning starters, led by leading scorer, junior guard Aaron Thomas. Thomas averaged 14.5 points and 4.2 rebounds per game in 2013-14 as one of the nation's most well-rounded guards. Joining Thomas, in what could be one of the best backcourts in the ACC, are fellow junior guards Devon Bookert and Brandon. Bookert will use his consistent long-range shooting to stretch defenses out, building on an impressive collegiate career 3-point shooting average of 46.6 percent. Jack-of-all-trades Brandon gives the Seminoles flexibility with his size and athleticism. At 6-foot-8 and 225 pounds, Brandon is a matchup nightmare for opponents, especial-

ly since he can play anywhere except center. The already impressive backcourt could be even more potent with the belated addition of the Seminoles' 2013-14 top recruit, freshman guard Xavier Rathan-Mayes. The highly touted guard was ruled academically ineligible in 2013, but now that Rathan-Mayes has his academics in order, he could be a dark horse standout player in the ACC. FSU also boasts one of the largest frontcourts in the nation. The fourth returning starter, Slovakian junior center Boris Bojanovsky, leads a trio of 7-footers on the roster. Alongside the 7-foot-3, 240-pound Bojanovsky are 7-foot-1, 292-pound junior Michael Ojo and 7-foot, 240-pound redshirt graduate Kiel Turpin. All three give the Seminoles a towering defensive presence, but only Bojanovsky has shown offensive capabilities as well. "Working on just being connected, all getting on the same

page," Thomas said. "We're doing a lot of pick-and-roll things, getting our big men involved more. Coach stressed that a lot, getting our big men the ball more." A more-experienced lineup, along with added depth from another solid recruiting class,

gives Hamilton a competitive squad that can contend with any team in the ACC. New and old ACC teams alike would be wise not to overlook FSU on their schedules. "We have not been the most talented team in the ACC, but I think we've been

able to respond appropriately and win enough games," Hamilton said. "Now hopefully with a little more depth and improved offensive skills, this will be another year where we will surprise a lot of people."

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DTH FILE PHOTO
UNC guard Marcus Paige (5) looks to make a shot against Florida State on March 3, 2013, the last time UNC played Florida State at the Smith Center. The two teams met twice in the 2013-14 season.

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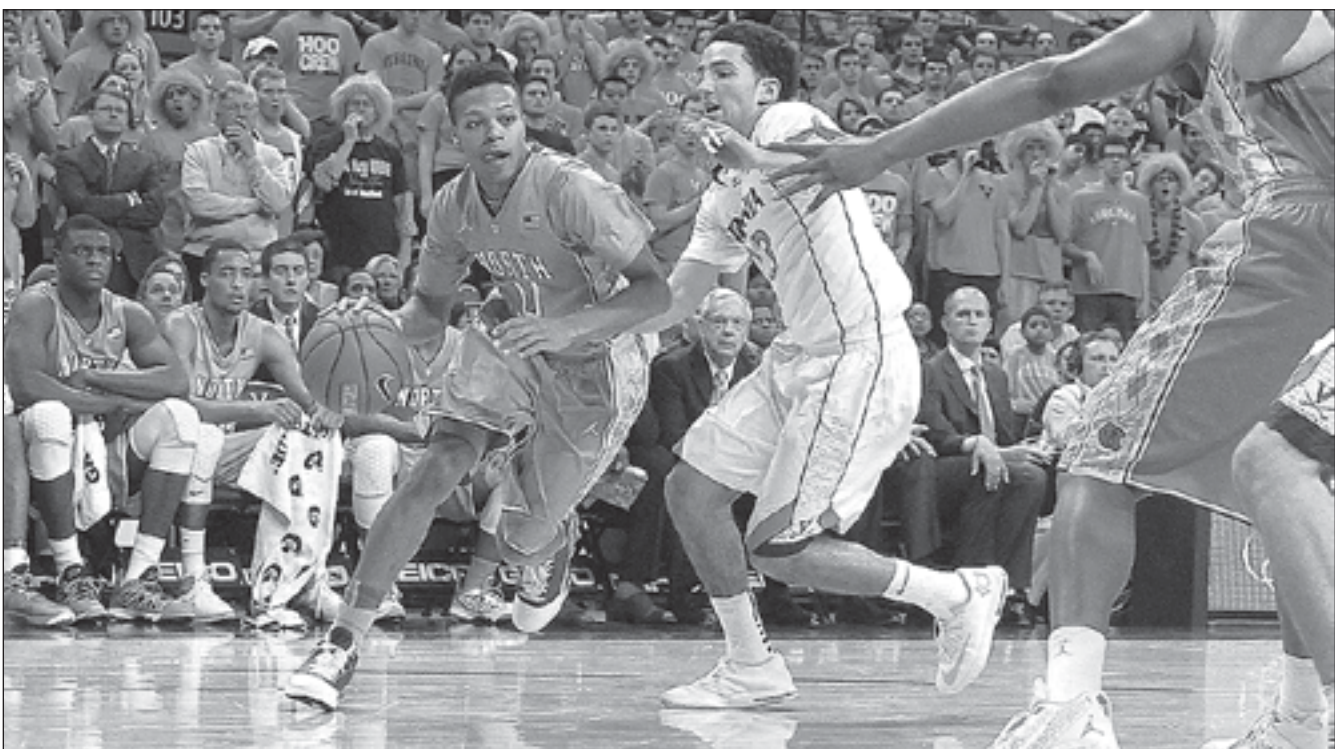
By Jeremy Vernon
Staff Writer

They won the conference regular season and tournament championship. They made it to the Sweet Sixteen. They are returning their top scorer and three of their five starters from



2013-14, and yet the members of the Virginia basketball team are still viewed as underdogs in a stacked ACC. UVa. was picked to finish fourth in the conference behind Duke, North Carolina and Louisville. And although fans are grumbling, players and coaches aren't distracted. They know what they are capable of. "It's not something you really process," said redshirt junior Malcolm Brogdon. "We actually embrace that underdog role; it just adds fuel to the fire." Brogdon led the Cavaliers in scoring and steals last year after sitting out for the 2012-2013 season with a foot injury. This year, the Atlanta native was named to the pre-season All-ACC team, and is

poised for another big year. Along with Brogdon are two pieces from the team that won its first ACC regular season title since 2007 and its first tournament title since 1976 last season. Sophomore point guard London Perrantes and junior Justin Anderson, who will slide into the position that Joe Harris occupied, both return. In the frontcourt, Darion Atkins and Anthony Gill will be called upon to fill the void that Akil Mitchell left after graduating. Atkins, one of few Cavalier seniors, said that he is ready to step up. "In the offseason I've just been working on getting stronger," he said. "Naturally I'm a pretty good defensive player and rebounder, so I've just been primarily working on my offense." Once again, the key for the Cavaliers will be predicated on defense and selfless play. Last season, UVa. gave up 55.7 points per game, good enough for first in the country, while no Cavalier averaged more than 13 points per game.. "We're more of an equal-opportunity team. I think that has become more our way with what we've had," Coach Tony



North Carolina guard Nate Britt (left) drives the ball past Virginia forward Anthony Gill. UNC lost to UVa. 76-61 on Jan. 20 at Virginia. DTH FILE/KATIE WILLIAMS

Bennett said. "There is room for some big games, but normally teams who rely on one guy are easier to shut down." Virginia's schedule includes tough non-conference games against No. 15 Virginia Commonwealth and No. 25 Harvard, as well as ACC games at North Carolina and Louisville. With the odds stacked

against a repeat performance, Atkins and the group embraces the underdog role. "We had a little saying last year. We said, 'They never really loved us,'" Atkins said. "We love being the underdog, and we're ready to show that we should be No. 1 in the ACC."

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Syracuse, Boeheim remain competitive despite losses

By Logan Ulrich
Staff Writer

Every coach is competitive. But Hall of Fame Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim takes it to another level. The man with the second-most wins all time in college basketball

won't even let up for a game of CandyLand with his daughter.

"I never let my daughter beat me," Boeheim said. "I never would. She knows that." She understands her dad has to be that way to survive.

In 2013-14, Syracuse went 25 games before its first loss. This season, Syracuse is barely ranked among the nation's top-25 teams.

Syracuse's No. 23 ranking reflects not only the players the team lost, but the increased level of competition it will face.

"It was a constant battle," Boeheim said. "We had a great start, but we're really winning games by the thinnest of margins against



UNC men's basketball players watch as former Syracuse forward Jerami Grant dunks in a game. COURTESY OF THE DAILY ORANGE

everybody. Not just the good teams, but everybody." Louisville only increases the degree of difficulty, giving the conference four Hall of Fame coaches and four top-10 teams. "From top to bottom, this conference is unbelievable," redshirt junior guard Trevor

Cooney said. In addition to a tougher schedule, sensational freshman point guard Tyler Ennis left for the NBA. The team also lost forwards C.J. Fair and Jerami Grant. The trio scored 60 percent of Syracuse's points last season. To reload and try to stay competitive, Boeheim will rely heavily on Cooney and senior forward Rakeem Christmas. "Both guys have had tremendous starts to their careers," Boeheim said. "They've brought a lot to the program, but I believe that they've got a lot more in them." Cooney shot 240 3-pointers last season and made 37.5 percent of them. No other returning Syracuse player had more than 43 3-point attempts, leaving the fourth-year guard as the only proven threat on the perimeter. Christmas averaged just under six points per game in his third year. "I think I have to be more

this year," Christmas said. A pair of fresh faces, incoming freshmen guard Kaleb Joseph and forward Chris McCullough, are expected to replace lost starters and keep the team competitive. Joseph will be charged with filling the void left by Ennis, whose clutch shots and uncharacteristic poise for a freshman were a huge part of 2013-14. So far through practice and preseason exhibition games, Joseph has shown he's just as talented as his predecessor. "He's really explosive," Cooney said. "He's quick, he gets up and down the floor." But the real test will come when the games start to count. Boeheim says a successful season depends on both old and new players stepping up. But if the season goes south, Boeheim always has CandyLand to fall back on.

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Pittsburgh's Cameron Wright shoots over North Carolina's Nate Britt. The Tar Heels defeated Pitt in the 2013-14 season 75-71. DTH FILE PHOTO

Pittsburgh relies on depth

By David Allen Jr.
Staff Writer


What sticks out for senior Cameron Wright as he enters his final season with the Pittsburgh basketball team is the last-second shot from Tyler Ennis to give then-No. 1 Syracuse a 58-56 win in front of a shocked Panther crowd. "I didn't think it was real, honestly," Wright said, remembering the moment. "I didn't know what had happened, we were winning the entire game it felt like."

That loss still haunts Wright but was just one of 13 games that were decided by five points or fewer in the Panthers' inaugural Atlantic Coast Conference season. This year Coach Jamie Dixon and a veteran Panthers team — which returns 59 percent of its scoring from last year and three key starters — look to improve in those games without Lamar Patterson, last year's leading scorer and an All-ACC selection. "We lost some close games, and we lost some games we shouldn't have, to be honest," Dixon said. "If you want to win the conference, you've got to win your home games." Dixon was pleased with finishing 7-2 on the road, but the 4-5 record at home will be an area for improvement moving forward. The Panthers will call upon a veteran backcourt of Wright and James Robinson to help guide this team in taking its game to the next level. Wright is the top returning scorer for the Panthers, averaging just over 10 points per game. He also finished in double digits in 20 games last year. But an injury will keep him out at least the first five games, which will include Pittsburgh's trip to Hawaii for the Maui Invitational. Robinson will join Wright as the 2-guard, where he looks to build off a stellar season which included finishing sixth in the nation in the assist per turnover department and was a finalist for the Bob Cousy award for the nation's top point guard, with 148 assists. "Playing with Cam, he really makes the game easy for me," Robinson said. "I know where he's going to be at on the court, he knows where I'm going to be." The friendship and experience between these two guards will be the foundation of the roster, but Wright noted that the team has been growing stronger as a unit. "I've never been a part of a team that has been so close in all my life," Wright said. "I'm really looking forward to getting out there on the floor with these guys." The frontcourt will be more of a rotating cast for Pittsburgh, with Durand Johnson and Joseph Uchebo headlining the group who will see minutes for the Panthers. Johnson is coming off a gruesome ACL tear from last season and looks to build upon his hot start in the 2013-14 campaign, when he averaged 8.8 points and three rebounds per game in 16 games. And with a home schedule that features North Carolina, Louisville and Syracuse again, Johnson and the Panthers will have plenty of chances for Tyler Ennis-redemption. "We're still a team that's finding our identity, finding our rotation, as are all teams at this point," Dixon said.

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Meeks drops the weight, keeps the flair

By Robbie Harms
Senior Writer

Kennedy Meeks likes to make people laugh, and he likes to smile, and these two things are related, so Kennedy Meeks is happy. Like at this year's Late Night With Roy. Meeks, a forward on the North Carolina men's basketball team, took the mic at midcourt and made an announcement.

"I will be singing 'I Will Always Love You,' by Whitney Houston," he told the crowd, and right then it was possible to see every single one of Meeks' teeth, such was the magnitude of his grin.

"Why did you look at me when you said that?" host Bobby Frasier asked.

Meeks opened his mouth to say something, leaned over to the microphone. No words emerged, so there stood Meeks, speechless and smiling.

What followed, of course, was one of the more memorable Late Night skits, with Meeks passionately lip-syncing the Grammy-winning love song, falling to his knees histrionically, then laying on his back on the court. He never broke a smile.

That's Meeks: a 6-foot-9 sophomore from Charlotte who loves to keep his teammates loose. "Loose? What does loose mean?" Meeks asks after UNC's 112-34 exhibition win against Belmont Abbey on Friday.

Like, unworried, not uptight. "Oh, yeah. Yeah," Meeks says.

"Physically, the changes that (Kennedy Meeks has) made is making him a more explosive player."

Roy Williams,
men's basketball coach

"That's the most important part about it."

It's settled, then: Meeks, who had 14 points on six-of-seven shooting in 12 minutes Friday, is a smiling motivator.

That's it? A big goofball? No. Meeks is more.

He's a graceful giant, a big man with a soft touch both around the rim and away from it. He shot 55 percent from the field last season and started 50 percent of games. He averaged about eight points and six rebounds a game. Now, he's a breakout candidate, a player many expect to solidify UNC's ever-evolving frontcourt this season.

Why? First, a story.

Meeks smiled after he proved them wrong. They had said he couldn't windmill. So there he was, wearing a tight-fitting black tank that paraded a new-found chiseled frame, throwing down a windmill at a Charlotte gym this summer.

He smiled, but not that smile. Not the one from Late Night, not the one splashing his face when he's excitedly whipping a towel on the ground, watching his teammates from the bench.

No, this smile was different. It was more a "Yep, I just did that" smirk, a gesture that

cemented the emergence of the new Kennedy.

"This one is for the people who said I couldn't windmill," reads the caption to his Instagram video of the dunk, followed by nine emojis, three of them smiley faces.

The new Kennedy is a fitter Kennedy, 50 pounds lighter and one year wiser.

"It's something I've been working on for a long time," Meeks, listed at 270 pounds but closer to 266, says of cutting weight. "It's finally paid off."

"Physically, the changes that he's made is making him a more explosive player," said Coach Roy Williams.

"I'm really proud of what he's done. It takes a lot for him to be able to lose that much weight in a year's time," junior forward Brice Johnson says.

"He's a lot more explosive than he was last year. And hopefully, he'll have a lot more dunks than Marcus (Paige) this year."

The new Kennedy has not, however, lost his charm. He still adheres to the same philosophy.

"No matter if we were to lose a game, just keep smiling," Meeks said.



DTH FILE/CHRIS CONWAY

Kennedy Meeks, a sophomore forward from Charlotte, dropped 50 pounds in the past year. Coach Roy Williams said it has made Meeks a much more explosive player.

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Freshmen talent is aplenty for Blue Devils

By Ben Salkeld
Staff Writer

It might be a while before Duke fans forget their team's early NCAA Tournament exit at the hands of No. 14 seed Mercer in March. But for the Blue Devils on the court, last season's shortcomings are already in the rearview mirror.



"If you take anything from the last season to the next season, I think it's a mistake," Coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

"You have to start out fresh ... You've got to concentrate on who you are right now."

Who are the preseason No. 4 Duke Blue Devils right now?

Well, for starters, they have the Associated Press Preseason Player of the Year in 6-foot-11, 270-pound true freshman center Jahlil Okafor.

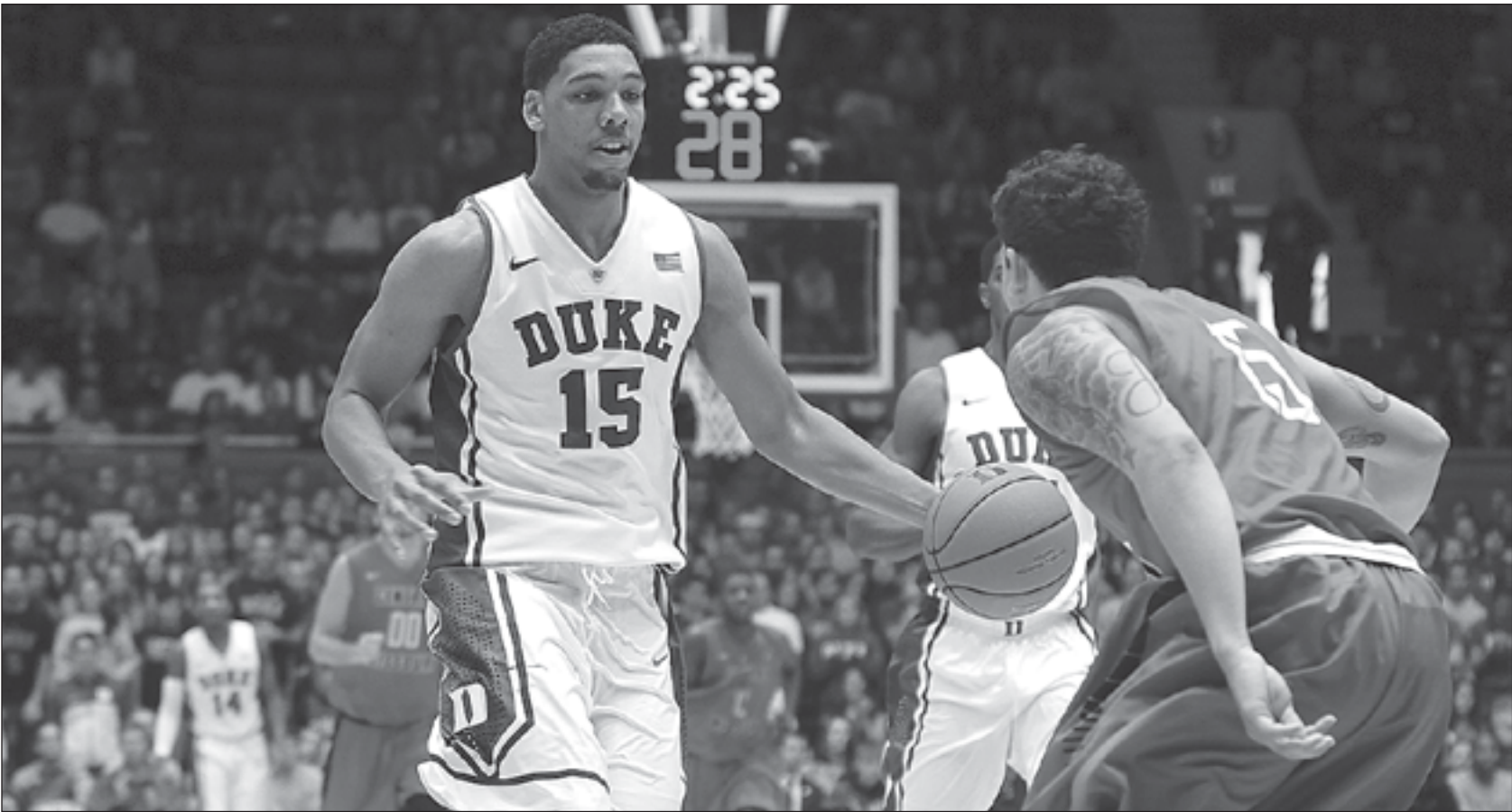
"He's as talented as everybody says," senior guard Quinn Cook said.

"He's dedicated to the game. He takes it seriously. He wants to win."

If he is as good as they say he is, Okafor will be a double-team magnet, a defensive anchor below the basket and a post presence that the Blue Devils didn't have last year.

Cook, a team co-captain, said Okafor is already the best scorer on the team. What might make him even more dangerous, however, is the ways in which he can open up the floor for his teammates.

"It's really good for me and our unit to have a force like that in the middle — someone who's going to demand so much attention," said



THE CHRONICLE/JESUS HIDALGO

Freshman center Jahlil Okafor came into the Duke program as the No. 1 overall prospect in the 2014 class. Okafor was named the AP Preseason Player of the Year.

Amile Jefferson, a junior forward and Cook's fellow co-captain.

"It's going to make the game easier for all our guys."

With Okafor at center, Jefferson can move to his natural position at the power forward spot, where he says he hopes to improve the team's rebounding numbers — which ranked 193rd in rebounds per game in Division I last year.

As an added bonus, Okafor's defensive prowess should allow guards like Cook and junior Rasheed Sulaimon to play more aggressive defense, knowing that they have a rim protector behind them.

The rest of Duke's ESPN top-ranked recruiting class in

the nation is nothing short of dangerous in its own right.

The Blue Devils also welcome two recruits who have played alongside Okafor in the Team USA basketball youth system.

Top-ranked point guard recruit Tyus Jones will likely be the new floor general for the team, and forward Justise Winslow has elite athleticism on defense.

"(Winslow) is going to be one of the unique players in the ACC this year," Jefferson said.

"He's going to be one of

those do-it-all guys for us."

The high level of talent and maturity possessed by the freshman group, which is rounded out by the 2014 recruiting class' sixth-ranked shooting guard in Grayson Allen, should allow the newcomers to make an immediate impact on the team.

"(The freshmen) embraced the upperclassmen," Krzyzewski said.

"The guys right now don't look at each other as freshmen and sophomores and juniors and senior. They just

look at each other as Quinn and Tyus and Justise, and that's a little bit unusual. It's unusually good."

Duke had elite recruits and top-notch talent last year and failed to convert it into a deep run during March.

Jefferson said he hopes this team can change that fortune.

"For me personally, it's something that is one of our goals for this season — to hang a banner," he said.

"It's a process. Our guys are doing the things right now to be worthy of winning, and winning big."

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The Manning era begins at Wake Forest

By Patrick Ronan
Staff Writer

Wake Forest faithful got the change they were looking for — the Jeff Bzdelik era is over, and Danny Manning made the move from Tulsa to the ACC.

It would be hard to blame Wake Forest men's basketball fans for wanting a change, as

the Demon Deacons went from one of the best programs in the conference to an ACC bottom-feeder in less than a decade.

Since Chris Paul left Winston-Salem for the NBA after a 27-6 2004-05 season, the Demon Deacons have gone a combined 144-140, with just a pair of 20-plus-win seasons and NCAA Tournament bids.

Manning proved to be an incredible player in his college days, single-handedly willing the Kansas Jayhawks to the 1988 national championship on a team nicknamed "Danny and the Miracles." But it might be difficult for Manning to pull off any feats

of brilliance in his first year at the helm.

The Demon Deacons return their two leading scorers in guard Codi Miller-McIntyre and forward Devin Thomas. But aside from the two juniors, Wake Forest doesn't have a single returning player who averaged more than 3.3 points per game last season.

Manning will have to deal with effects of the Bzdelik departure, as well. Experienced junior forwards Tyler Cavanaugh and Arnaud William Adala Moto both transferred, but the biggest blow might be losing highly recruited guard Shelton Mitchell, who was released from his letter of intent in late April before committing to Vanderbilt in May. Shelton was the only Wake Forest recruit ranked by Rivals or ESPN.

Manning made it clear about who he's expecting to lead the Demon Deacons back to the top half of the ACC.

"Our junior class is the backbone of our team," he said.

"We have five guys that have been in the ACC action for a while. They understand the

rigors, they understand how tough it is to be successful in this league and they're sharing that message with our newcomers and our young guys."

From the sounds of Miller-McIntyre and fellow junior Aaron Rountree, it didn't take suicides or wind sprints to get the players' attention.

"He will get on us like no other, and that's definitely a big difference for us because we never really had something like that," Miller-McIntyre said.

"But the fact that he's played in the NBA for the amount of time that he has and has succeeded there — great college player, obviously. When he tells us something, it's almost like, okay, we have to listen."

And if he needs to get his players' attention, Manning isn't afraid to pull out his secret weapon — substituting the basketball for a balled-up towel wrapped in duct tape. It's something he says he picked up from Kansas coach Bill Self while Manning was a part of Self's coaching staff.

"When they come to basketball practice and they don't see any basketballs,



DTH FILE/HALLE SINNOTT
UNC forward Brice Johnson (11) blocks a shot by Wake Forest guard Codi Miller-McIntyre (0). UNC defeated Wake Forest 105-72 on Feb. 22, 2014 at the Smith Center. They will meet again Jan. 21.

you're like, 'It's going to be a conditioning day if we don't get this right,'" Manning said.

"It gives us a chance to really lock in and focus because, you know, you can't dribble those." Wake Forest will have to

find some proven scorers if they want to improve on last year's 17-16 mark. But it seems like there might finally be some continuity in the locker room for the first time since the late Skip Prosser's coaching tenure.

"For us, (Manning's) just brought in a winning culture and just a new level of excitement," Rountree said, "almost like a breath of fresh air."

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DTH FILE/MATT RENN
Brice Johnson has gained 40 pounds since he arrived at UNC as a freshman in 2012. The junior forward hopes the weight gain, and his court experience will translate to a starting role this season.

BRICE JOHNSON

FROM PAGE 1

pie or something.

"It's a problem I have now. Every time I see something I have to eat it. I'm really on a 'see food' diet for real now."

Johnson arrived to Chapel Hill in 2012 weighing 187 pounds. As a freshman, his smaller size dictated his style of play: a lot of quick shots. Any time Johnson got some space, he fired. And if he got a little more, he finished the play off with his trademark tomahawk dunk, accented with a powerful yell and pound of his chest.

"Our freshman year, he was kind of our energy guy who'd come off the bench, get a dunk and scream or flex his muscles," junior point guard Marcus Paige said. "Or flex whatever he had."

In high school, the muscles worked. Johnson established a reputation of being a banger inside. As a senior at Edisto High School in his home state of South Carolina, he averaged 25.4 points, 14.3 rebounds and 8.3 blocks a game.

Yet the college game

brought greater physicality, with forwards 40 and 50 pounds heavier than him. Even worse, Johnson spent his first two years at UNC playing a lot at the center position. So, add another 20 or 30 pounds to the players Johnson matched up with as a center.

Williams had to convince Johnson that gaining weight, though a trying process, would benefit him in the long run. That the weight gain wouldn't affect his athleticism. The athleticism that led him to two high school state titles in the high jump during track and field season.

"There's ... a transition period for Brice," Williams said. "Brice is worrying about the extra weight affecting his running or jumping. So I say, 'It's not going to do that if you put it out of our mind that it can affect your strength and ability to get that rebound.'"

The two-year transition on the path to building a bigger Brice has been rough, especially this summer when the forward battled recurring ankle injuries, and running up and down the court with the new weight didn't seem to help.

"I wasn't really comfortable with (the weight)," he said. "I started to get out of shape. It started to affect me a lot. Then, as conditioning started, I started to get a lot more comfortable with it."

Johnson's current comfort has been determined by his routine, which relies heavily on two things: "Eat as much as I can. Lift weights," he says.

He's anxious to test out his new frame in the regular season.

"I won't be bullied," he said. "I can be the bully now."

And though he hasn't said it, Johnson's weight gain has led to perhaps his biggest accomplishment yet at UNC. His more solid stature, coupled with his veteran leadership, has Johnson poised to claim the full-time starting power forward job that evaded him for quite some time.

In two seasons as a Tar Heel, Johnson has started just four out of the 70 games he's played.

"I'm gonna have to earn everything I get," he said.

Earn every single pound and every single minute as a starter.

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DTH FILE/KATIE WILLIAMS
Marcus Paige was selected as the preseason ACC player of the year at the conference's annual media day Oct. 29. Paige led the Tar Heels during the 2013-14 season with 17.5 points a game.

MARCUS PAIGE

FROM PAGE 1

think I have to give them as much as I did last year."

Maybe he's right — maybe he won't have to. Justin Jackson, Kennedy Meeks, Brice Johnson and J.P. Tokoto, Paige's anticipated fellow starters, have shown they're capable of lightening his load. Through two exhibition games, Paige is averaging just

15.5 minutes per game, a far cry from the 35.6 he gave in 2013-14. Against Belmont Abbey, Paige totaled a mere nine points, the second lowest total amongst UNC starters.

"I mean Marcus has proved himself at the end of games," said Johnson, Paige's roommate and teammate. "We just have to find somebody else that can do it, too."

"This year we're just going to have to see what close

games we get to and see who's going to step up if it's not him."

Who will it be? That's still an unknown.

But for Williams, one thing remains certain.

"If they're all like Marcus, I would pay our administration to let me coach instead of them pay me," he said.

"Nobody's perfect. But he's darn near perfect."

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SYLVIA HATCHELL

FROM PAGE 1

But the rope didn't begin with cancer. It arrived three years ago with a stranger, who, it turns out, was family all along.

Both ends of the rope

It's spring 2011, and Rodney Cook's in trouble. He's 63, retired, and his heart is failing him. He needs a new one, and bad. His name goes on a transplant list. There's no guarantee.

Wednesday, April 20, 2011 comes, and with it a Rams Club speaking engagement at a Raleigh country club featuring coaches Hatchell, Williams and Butch Davis. Rodney's son, Travis, a 36-year-old senior manager at an appraisal company, had tickets for his dad, who went to UNC for undergrad and law school from 1965 to 1974. Rodney had never heard Hatchell speak. It mattered little. Because, as Hatchell's longtime executive assistant Jane High says, "You never know when you give a speech who you're going to speak to."

It began with a simple question from an audience member to Hatchell: How had UNC's 2010-11 team turned an unspectacular regular season into a Sweet 16 trip? Simple: Hold the Rope.

UNC lost four straight to end the regular season. Before the ACC Tournament began, Hatchell opened an email from Brenda Paul, the women's basketball coach at Young Harris College in Georgia. It was the story of Hold the Rope. Hatchell ran to a pet store and bought a blue, white and black chew rope. She gave every player a copy of the story. If you can Hold the Rope for each other, Hatchell said, if you can believe in this, we will win the ACC. Every huddle in Greensboro closed with a mention of Hold the Rope. UNC won four games in four days and the ACC title, then rattled off three straight NCAA Tournament wins before losing to Stanford.

A month later, she tells the country club audience the parable and its basketball application. And there, seated somewhere in the throngs of UNC revelers, Rodney Cook has an epiphany, the kind that shakes cobwebs from a sputtering heart and makes it glow. "It just hit me," he said. The event ends, and Rodney walks out of the clubhouse with Travis. He grabs his son and leans in.

"Travis," he says, "I want you on the other end of my rope."

The next morning, a phone rings at the Cooks' Raleigh home. It's Duke University Hospital, and doctors think they've found the right heart for Rodney. He calls his kids. It's time to Hold the Rope.

They need one first. Travis calls Jane High on his way to the hospital and introduces himself. Rodney's got his heart, Travis says. He wants to buy a rope like Hatchell's. The coach gets on the line and suggests meeting near the pet shop where she bought the first rope. But Travis wants to see his dad before he goes under. "Travis, you go to the hospital," Hatchell says. "Let me see what we can do about getting you a rope."

Hatchell has all-day meet-



COURTESY OF RODNEY COOK
Sylvia Hatchell and Rodney Cook have held each other's ropes, first for Cook's heart transplant then for Hatchell's leukemia.

ings with recruits. But she plucks a 20 from her pocket. "Jane," she says, "go out to the pet store and get a rope. And take it to Duke."

High does, finding Travis, by then only a voice on the phone, when she grabs the rope from her shopping bag and waves it in the hall. She presents it to Rodney, along with a printed copy of Hold the Rope and a personal inscription from Hatchell: "To Rodney: We're holding the rope for you. Love, Coach Hatchell." High wishes the Cooks well and leaves.

That's the last they hear of Rodney for a while. They don't know the heart wasn't a match, that Rodney waited two more weeks for the right heart while online well-wishers flooded him with pledges to hold his rope. They know nothing until High returns to Duke Hospital to await a sister-in-law's surgery and spots a familiar man across the waiting room.

"Jane," Travis Cook says, "my dad's in surgery right now."

Rodney returns home a few days later. He's out of the hospital all of 15 minutes when he calls Sylvia and Jane. He reaches Hatchell on her cell phone while she's fishing. "I want to come see you when I get stronger," Rodney says.

He does, in June 2011, but he arrives early for his 1:30 p.m. appointment. He has to track down Hatchell while she eats a hot dog at Sutton's Drug Store. Rodney forks through the crowd, heads straight for coach. He wraps his arms around her neck. And he hands Hatchell a check for the Jessica Breland Comeback Kids Fund, named for the UNC forward and eventual WNBA starter, who beat Hodgkin's lymphoma while playing for Hatchell.

"I want to give back," Rodney says to Hatchell, "because you gave to me."

Rodney, now, is family. He appears at every team function. It was meant to be, he says, this unexpected union between a man with a new heart and a coach with a new rope.

"But see?" said Hatchell Tuesday. "I always say, just like me having cancer: There's a reason for everything. And like I told my team and I told Sammy, 'You know what? If my team hadn't been playing badly in February, Brenda Paul would never have sent me that story, and Rodney Cook would never have happened.'" She smiled.

"Isn't that something?"

'A matter of perspective'

It did happen for a reason, didn't it? She was already a longtime benefactor of the Lineberger Center. The N.C. Cancer Hospital named a classroom after her in October. She wants to build a workout room for chemo patients there, something more than the lone treadmill at the end of the hall, to give them the antidote of exercise that proved paramount to Hatchell's recovery. But would her advocacy reach have stretched this far without warding off leukemia?

"No, no, no," Hatchell said. "There's no way."

Would Wingate University senior guard Jasmine DeBerry, a Charlotte native, have donated marrow on behalf of the stricken coach whose UNC basketball camps she grew up attending? Would she have found a perfect match with a 9-year-old girl who had leukemia, gone to Georgetown to give the marrow, or been given the chance to meet the girl next July with Hatchell by her side?

Would Rodney Cook have taken a call from an in-law in Mount Airy on New Year's Day 2013, whose friend had slipped into a month-long coma? Would that friend's wife have heard of the rope story and of the man who personified its core? Would Cook have driven to the man's hospital with a rope signed by Hatchell's team and told the moral by which he will always live — as he has to anyone who has reached out to him?

"It's a matter of perspective, isn't it?" Cook said.

"So many times, we get so much junk in the way, you know?" Hatchell said. "Distractions and things, and trust me: Cancer filters all of that out. You see much more clear what really makes a difference."

Like doctors and donors, friends and family, random acts of kindness in the name of a not-so-random cause: Carrying someone when they don't have the strength to stand, holding the other end of their rope — just as so many did for Rodney Cook and Sylvia Hatchell.

Remarkable, isn't it, what a dog's chew rope can do for the soul?

sports@dailytarheel.com

UNC women’s basketball hopes to overcome losses

By Pat James
Assistant Sports Editor

For the North Carolina women’s basketball team, the end of 2013-14 was marred by loss.

After building a six-point halftime lead in the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament, the Tar Heels fell to the Stanford Cardinals in a heartbreaking defeat — losing by nine points.

And nearly three weeks after the loss, UNC was dealt another devastating blow when ACC Rookie of the Year and espnW National Freshman of the Year Diamond DeShields announced she would transfer.

But despite both losses, it’s what UNC gains in the return of Hall of Fame coach Sylvia Hatchell, who missed all of the 2013-14 season after being diagnosed with leukemia, that they hope will allow them to build upon their success.

“Last year, we had to worry about her health and how she was doing, like day-to-day just checking up on her,” said senior guard Danielle Butts at ACC women’s basketball media day. “Just to have her back and to practice and just getting back in the flow is definitely a blessing. “We missed her a lot, and the fact we don’t have to worry about her as much because she’s right there with us every day in practice and when we’re in weights, in film and stuff like that, just makes our motivation more.”

Excluding DeShields, pre-season No. 13 UNC is returning its entire starting lineup.

After posting a 27-10 record in the 2013-14 season, UNC’s finish in the NCAA Tournament was the furthest the team advanced in post-season play since the 2007-08 campaign. Hatchell said that while she’s been anxious about her return, she has one fear in the back of her mind.

“I just don’t want to mess them up,” Hatchell said. “I just

want to add to what they did last year. They went to the Elite Eight and missed the Final Four by only three buckets, and I just don’t want to mess them up. I just want to add to it and help them get to the next level.”

In order for the Tar Heels to reach that point, the team must supplant DeShields’ production on the offensive end of the floor — which accounted for 18.0 points per game.

But with an ACC-best three players named to the Blue Ribbon Panel Preseason All-ACC Team in sophomores Allisha Gray and Stephanie Mavunga and junior Xylina McDaniel, as well as a roster with seven upperclassmen, the team makes up a dominant offensive threat with four key traits, Hatchell said.

“We have leadership, we’ve got experience, we’ve got depth and great chemistry,” she said. “And I feel like we’ve got a great game plan as far as how to implement on that.”

Senior guard Latifah Coleman said the team’s chemistry could carry it to success.

“The one thing we need to maintain and abide by is the idea of togetherness,” she said. “Coach always says, ‘We’re five individuals working together



DTH FILE/JOHANNA FEREBEE
Guard Allisha Gray (15) averaged 13.9 points a game in 2013-14.

as one.’ And I believe teamwork and togetherness will be the key to our success this year.”

With all of the key ingredients of a championship-caliber team, Hatchell said she hopes to provide her team with the ultimate gain.

“I want to bring out the best

in them both on the court and off the court, and I want to put some rings on their fingers,” she said. “I want to bring some championships to these young ladies and something they can have for the rest of their life.”

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2014-15 WOMEN’S BASKETBALL ROSTER

| No. | Player | Year | Pos. | Height |
|-----|--------------------|------|------|--------|
| 0 | Jamie Cherry | FR | G | 5-8 |
| 1 | Stephanie Mavunga | SO | F | 6-3 |
| 2 | Latifah Coleman | SR | G | 5-9 |
| 3 | Megan Buckland | JR* | G | 6-0 |
| 10 | Danielle Butts | SR | G | 5-10 |
| 11 | Brittany Rountree | SR | G | 5-9 |
| 13 | Hillary Fuller | SO* | F | 6-2 |
| 15 | Allisha Gray | SO | G | 6-0 |
| 22 | N'Dea Bryant | JR | G | 6-0 |
| 24 | Jessica Washington | SO | G | 5-8 |
| 30 | Hillary Summers | SO* | F | 6-2 |
| 31 | Erika Johnson | SR | F | 6-1 |
| 34 | Xylina McDaniel | JR | F | 6-2 |

*denotes redshirt

2014 Waikiki Beach Marriott Rainbow Wahine Shootout

The North Carolina women’s basketball team will compete in the Rainbow Wahine Shootout in Honolulu, Hawaii on Friday, Nov. 28 through Sunday, Nov. 30.

FRIDAY

8 p.m. EST Stanford vs. UNC

10:30 p.m. EST Prairie View A&M vs. Hawaii

SATURDAY

8 p.m. EST Prairie View A&M vs. UNC

10:30 p.m. EST Stanford vs. Hawaii

SUNDAY

8 p.m. EST Stanford vs. Prairie View A&M

10:30 p.m. EST UNC vs. Hawaii

Georgia Tech ready to put toughness to test

By Andrew Romaine
Staff Writer

Corey Heyward was frank as he leaned into the microphone at ACC Media Day. Asked to clarify the source of the collective ‘chip’ on the

shoulders of the Georgia Tech men’s

basketball team, the sophomore guard didn’t fumble for words.

“We’re ranked at the bottom of the ACC and I think we’re better than that,” Heyward said. “So the chip comes from feeling like we’ve got something to prove.”

To be exact, the Yellow Jackets were picked by members of the media to finish 13th out of 15 ACC teams. It’s a fair projection: There’s not much on paper to indicate that Georgia Tech will be vastly better than last season’s 6-12 conference record.

But Heyward and his teammates have hope — hope that stems from a growing comfort with fourth-year coach Brian Gregory’s system, a belief that last season’s strong finish will carry over to this year and a hunch that junior forward Marcus Georges-Hunt is primed for a



DTH FILE/DANIEL WILCO
UNC guard Marcus Paige dunks in a game against Georgia Tech. The Tar Heels beat Georgia Tech away 78-65 on Jan. 29, 2014.

breakout year.

“This is a great group,” Georges-Hunt said. “This is the first time that every player on the team was recruited by Coach Gregory. We’re trying to surprise a lot of people.”

It won’t be easy for the Yellow Jackets to turn heads. They know as well as anyone

how brutal the ACC gauntlet can be. And with significantly less talent than the conference’s top dogs, Georgia Tech will rely on toughness and physicality to navigate the rocky road ahead.

The preparations began in the offseason. Georges-Hunt and Heyward, the team’s like-

ly leaders, both shed weight, giving up fast food and ramping up their training regimens. Georges-Hunt said the rest of the team has shown an equal willingness to make sacrifices, taking a workman-like approach to practices and training sessions.

But Gregory knows who his leaders are, and he will rely on them to set the tone he wants on the court.

“When people leave the arena,” Gregory said, “I want them to say, ‘Man, that’s the hardest-playing team I’ve ever seen. That’s a physical team and they’re not afraid to knock somebody down once in a while.’”

Having been denied a postseason appearance in each of their past four seasons, the Yellow Jackets have been hardened by adversity in recent years. Injuries plagued the team for much of last season and promising big man Robert Carter Jr. transferred to Maryland this past summer.

“In this league, one of the things you learn is that if you’re not a team that can fight through adversity and if you’re not a team with a high level of resolve and resilience, then you’re really in a tough spot,” Gregory said.

A postseason berth is a tall task for this year’s Georgia Tech team. But at least the

2014-15 WOMEN’S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

The North Carolina women’s basketball team faces one of the toughest schedules in the nation, with 10 games versus teams in the preseason top-25.

| DATE | TIME | OPPONENT | TV |
|--------------|--------|--------------------|----------------|
| Fri. Nov. 14 | 4 p.m. | vs. Howard | |
| Sun. Nov. 16 | 2 p.m. | vs. UCLA | |
| Wed. Nov. 19 | 6 p.m. | vs. Oklahoma State | ESPN3 |
| Sun. Nov. 23 | 6 p.m. | at Oregon | Pac-12 Network |

RAINBOW WAHINE SHOWDOWN

| | | |
|--------------|--------|----------------------|
| Fri. Nov. 28 | 8 p.m. | vs. Stanford |
| Sat. Nov. 29 | 8 p.m. | vs. Prairie View A&M |

Sun. Nov. 30 10:30 p.m. vs. Hawaii

ACC/BIG TEN CHALLENGE

| | | | |
|---------------|--------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Thurs. Dec. 4 | 7 p.m. | at Rutgers | Big Ten Network |
| Sun. Dec. 14 | 2 p.m. | vs. Appalachian State | |
| Tues. Dec. 16 | 6 p.m. | vs. Oregon State | ESPN3 |

CAROLINA WOMEN’S CHALLENGE

| | | | |
|----------------|--------|--------------------------|------------|
| Fri. Dec. 19 | 7 p.m. | vs. Maine | |
| Sun. Dec. 21 | 3 p.m. | vs. Elon | |
| Tues. Dec. 30 | 2 p.m. | vs. Albany | |
| Fri. Jan. 2 | 2 p.m. | vs. East Tennessee State | |
| Sun. Jan. 4 | 3 p.m. | vs. N.C. State | RSN/ESPN3 |
| Thurs. Jan. 8 | 7 p.m. | at Pittsburgh | |
| Sun. Jan. 11 | 3 p.m. | vs. Georgia Tech | RSN/ESPN3 |
| Thurs. Jan. 15 | 7 p.m. | vs. Notre Dame | RSN/ESPN3 |
| Sun. Jan. 18 | 2 p.m. | at Clemson | |
| Thurs. Jan. 22 | 7 p.m. | at N.C. State | |
| Sun. Jan. 25 | 5 p.m. | vs. Duke | ESPN2 |
| Sun. Feb. 1 | 2 p.m. | vs. Boston College | ESPN3 |
| Thurs. Feb. 5 | 7 p.m. | at Syracuse | ESPN3 |
| Sun. Feb. 8 | 1 p.m. | at Virginia Tech | RSN/ESPN3 |
| Thurs. Feb. 12 | 7 p.m. | vs. Florida State | RSN/ESPN3 |
| Sun. Feb. 15 | 1 p.m. | at Louisville | ESPN2 |
| Thurs. Feb. 19 | 7 p.m. | vs. Wake Forest | ESPN3 |
| Sun. Feb. 22 | 3 p.m. | at Miami | RSN/ESPN3 |
| Thurs. Feb. 26 | 7 p.m. | vs. Virginia | RSN/ ESPN3 |
| Sun. March 1 | 3 p.m. | at Duke | ESPN2 |

Yellow Jackets know what they’re up against. And they’re ready to do battle. “I see ourselves as a team that’s fighting to make an imprint, especially in the

ACC and college basketball,” Heyward said. “We’re a team of guys that wants to fight.”

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Hanlan’s return solidifies Eagles’ squad makeover

Boston College and its new coach are looking to turn the program around.

By C Jackson Cowart
Staff Writer

Following a disappointing season in which the team finished second to last in the conference, Boston College (8-24, 4-14 ACC) is hoping that significant changes in the program will inspire future success. But the one change the team couldn’t afford was losing its premier playmaker, Olivier Hanlan, to the NBA. “I was pretty close (to leaving),” said Hanlan, who was the ACC’s

third-leading scorer in 2013-14 with 18.5 points per game. “It was pretty crazy last year in terms of having a coach get fired, certain players leaving. I feel like that would be crazy for any player.” But after flirting with early entry into the draft, the Eagles’ top scorer said returning for his junior year gave him the best chance to improve. Improvement has defined the do-it-all guard’s career. After receiving only a few scholarships as a three-star recruit out of Canada, Hanlan burst onto the scene as a freshman, winning the 2012-13 ACC Freshman of the Year award. He followed it up with an All-ACC Third Team spot as a sophomore, finishing top two on the team in points, assists, rebounds, steals and minutes. Yet despite his breakout performance, the ACC’s leading returning scorer remains overlooked. “I’m kind of used to having that — people underrating me or not looking at me as much as at other players,” Hanlan said. “I use it as motivation and it’s kind of a chip on my shoulder, to be honest.” Despite feeling underappreciated, Hanlan’s impact did not go unnoticed by newly-hired coach Jim Christian, who knew that securing the young star’s commitment to return was pivotal to his new team’s success. “He’s got the attitude that you’d want for a great player,” Christian



J.P. Tokoto (13) defends guard Alex Dragicevich in the Jan. 18, 2013, game against Boston College. The Tar Heels pulled out an 82-71 win.

said. “He’s a guy that can score the ball, and he’s great in the open floor. But he’s also a guy that can get other people shots.” While Christian was able to retain the Eagle’s best player, other key contributors didn’t follow suit. With forward Ryan Anderson and point guard Joe Rahon — the team’s respective leaders in rebounds and assists — both moving on, the coaching staff is making changes to replace the transfers’ production. Rahon’s departure has forced Hanlan into assuming full-time point guard duties, something he feels quite comfortable with. “Not playing with another point guard, it’ll be a lot easier for me,” Hanlan said. “It’ll be a lot easier on my teammates, too — not having to adapt to two different types of point guards.” Anderson’s absence opens the door for the return of 7-foot-1 Dennis Clifford, who missed nearly all of the 2013-14 season with a knee injury. “He’s a guy that can run the floor unbelievably well; he’s got great hands, he has great touch, he has good feel,” Christian said. “To see him play pain-free basketball and enjoy the game has been rewarding.” Christian, the winningest coach in Mid-American Conference history, has emphasized defense to

complement an efficient yet slow-moving offense, which finished ninth in the ACC in field goal percentage but last in shots attempted. “In terms of efficiency, we had one of the top offenses in the ACC,” Hanlan said. “If we can just focus on defense and get those little stops and get five or six more shots a game ... We’ll improve a lot.” After dropping nine games decided by four points or less, Christian brought in two fifth-year transfers — Southern Mississippi forward Aaron Brown and Old Dominion guard Dimitri Batten — to bolster an already veteran-laden team. “They’ve changed our culture because they’re competitive guys who have won,” Christian said. “They’ve influenced practice and we’re establishing the habits that we want.” Despite low expectations, Christian is hoping the offseason changes can propel the Eagles to their first NCAA tournament bid since 2009. “Sometimes when there’s changes, guys emerge,” Christian said. “They get a different outlook, maybe a clean slate or maybe a part of their game emerges that didn’t emerge in the past. “And I think we have some of that, which is exciting.”

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2014-15 MEN’S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

| DATE | TIME | OPPONENT | TV |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Fri. Nov. 14 | 8 p.m. | vs. N.C. Central | ESPNU |
| Sun. Nov. 16 | 6 p.m. | vs. Robert Morris | ESPNU |
| Sat. Nov. 22 | 2 p.m. | at Davidson | Time Warner |
| Wed. Nov. 26 | Noon | vs. Butler (Bahamas) | ESPN2 |
| Thurs. Nov. 27 | TBA | vs. Oklahoma or UCLA (Bahamas) | |
| Fri. Nov. 28 | TBA | vs. UAB, Florida, Georgetown or Wisconsin | |
| Wed. Dec. 3 | 7:30 p.m. | vs. Iowa | ESPN |
| Sun. Dec. 7 | 3 p.m. | vs. East Carolina | ESPNU |
| Sat. Dec. 13 | Noon | at Kentucky | CBS |
| Tues. Dec. 16 | 7 p.m. | at UNC-G | ESPN2 |
| Sat. Dec. 20 | 1 p.m. | vs. Ohio State (Chicago) | CBS |
| Sat. Dec. 27 | 4 p.m. | vs. UAB | ESPN2 |
| Tues. Dec. 30 | TBA | vs. William & Mary | |
| Sat. Jan. 3 | TBA | at Clemson | ESPN |
| Mon. Jan. 5 | 7 p.m. | vs. Notre Dame | ESPN or ESPN2 |
| Sat. Jan. 10 | 2 p.m. | vs. Louisville | ESPN |
| Wed. Jan. 14 | 7 p.m. | at N.C. State | ESPN2 |
| Sun. Jan. 18 | 6:30 p.m. | vs. Virginia Tech | ESPNU |
| Wed. Jan. 21 | 7 p.m. | at Wake Forest | ESPN2 |
| Sat. Jan. 24 | 2 p.m. | vs. Florida State | ESPN or ESPN2 |
| Mon. Jan. 26 | 7 p.m. | vs. Syracuse | ESPN |
| Sat. Feb. 31 | TBA | at Louisville | ESPN or ESPN2 |
| Mon. Feb. 2 | 7 p.m. | vs. Virginia | ESPN |
| Sat. Feb. 7 | 3 p.m. | at Boston College | ACC Network |
| Sat. Feb. 14 | Noon | at Pitt | ACC Network |
| Wed. Feb. 18 | 9 p.m. | at Duke | ESPN/ ACC Network |
| Sat. Feb. 21 | Noon | vs. Georgia Tech | ACC Network |
| Tues. Feb. 24 | 8 p.m. | vs. N.C. State | ACC Network |
| Sat. Feb. 28 | 2 p.m. | at Miami | CBS |
| Tues. March 3 | 7 p.m. | at Georgia Tech | ESPNU |
| Sat. March 3 | TBA | vs. Duke | ESPN |

Notre Dame looks for more in second year in ACC

By Jane Zorowitz
Staff Writer

It’s not a stretch to say the Notre Dame men’s basketball team wasn’t too pleased with its inaugural season in the Atlantic Coast Conference. After finishing 15-17 overall

and 6-12 in the conference, it’s not difficult to see why. “We certainly got baptized by fire last year,” Coach Mike Brey said. “It was a rude awakening being a newcomer in this league.” But a year later, the Fighting Irish are looking to

redeem themselves and make a name in the ACC. With the return of seniors Jerian Grant, who decided to return after an academic-related suspension during the 2013-14 year, and Pat Connaughton, Notre Dame is looking for a return to the NCAA Tournament. “You go through a year like that, you go through a tough year, and you’re able to get through it with your teammates, and I think that brings a lot of guys closer together,” Connaughton said. “I think everyone is motivated to do better, and everyone is motivated to have each other’s backs and try to show the ACC the way we used to play.”

When he says ‘the way we used to play,’ Connaughton is referring to Notre Dame’s presence in the Big East; but early in conference play in the 2013-14 season, it became clear that the team had to approach its new ACC opponents differently. “None of the teams are the same from the Big East,” Grant said. “You can’t just figure out what they’re doing from who they played last year. I feel like in the Big East you knew what you were going to get.” And Brey agreed.

“You know, when you’re in the Big East all those years, you have your breakdown drills before you play Georgetown and before you play Connecticut, and we really didn’t have that,” he said. He also said, however, that he thinks the team has a little better feel for the league now. And the 1-2 combination of Connaughton and Grant — with 13.8 and 19 points per game respectively in the 2013-14 season — definitely won’t hurt the Irish. “With (Grant) and Connaughton as seniors, I think those are two of the 10 or 12 best returning players in the league,” Brey commented. “Pretty good place to start.

We feel we can play our way back into the mix of things in this league.” Notre Dame is looking to improve defensively and also try not to focus only on the Dukes and the North Carolinas, overlooking the games it is expected to win. They learned — the hard way — that you cannot do that in a power conference like the ACC. “I don’t think we’re just trying to be better than last season,” Connaughton said. “I think we’re trying to bring Notre Dame basketball back to where it was in the Big East, when we were at the top of the league year in and year out.”

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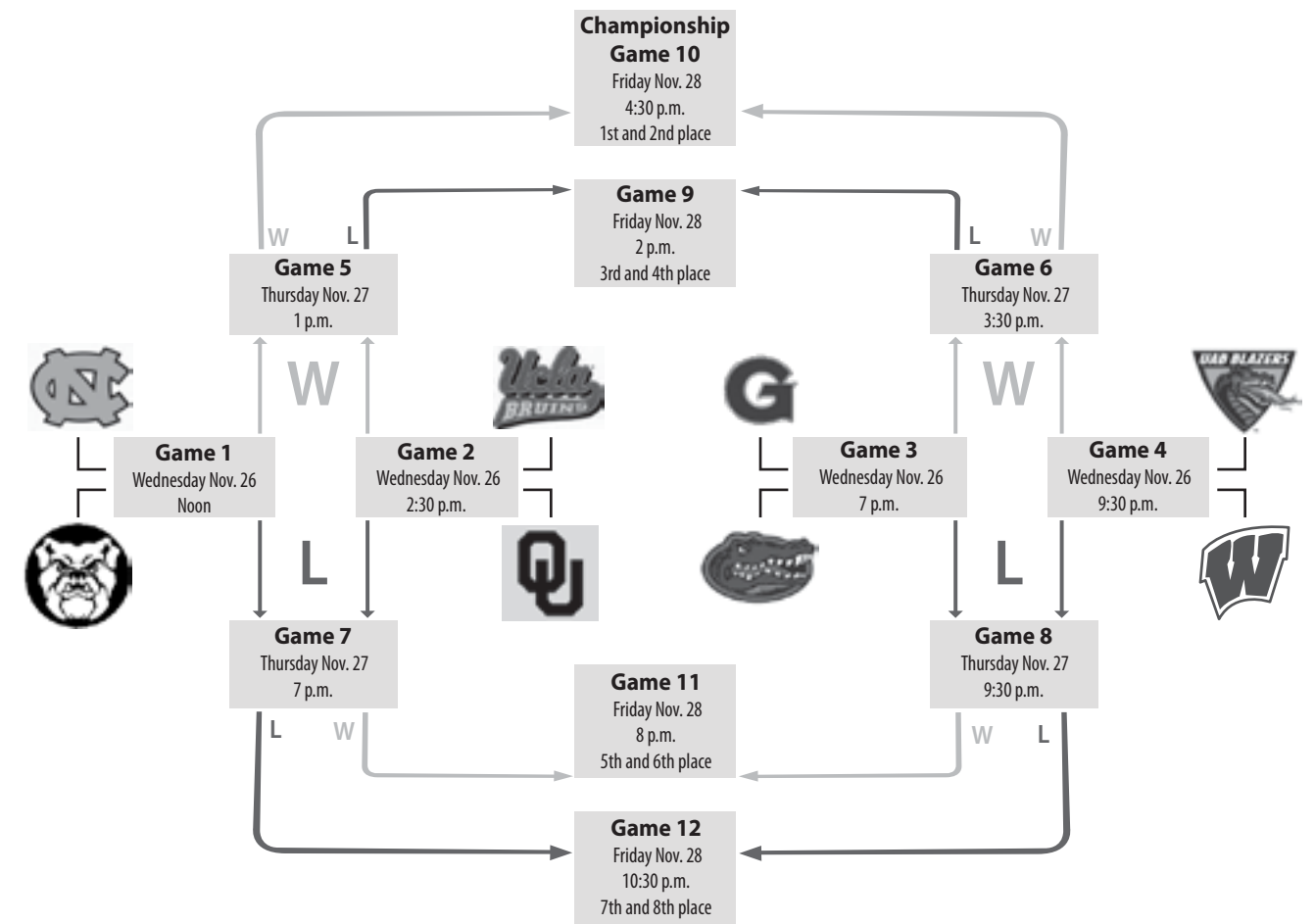
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BATTLE 4 ATLANTIS TOURNAMENT BRACKET:

The North Carolina basketball team will travel to Paradise Island in the Bahamas Nov. 26 to face off against Butler in the first game of the 2014 Battle 4 Atlantis tournament. There will be four top-25 teams at the event (Wisconsin, UNC, Florida and Oklahoma).



SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.ATLANTISBAHAMAS.COM](http://www.atlantisbahamas.com)

DTH/HEATHER CAUDILL



DTH FILE PHOTO
UNC forward Brice Johnson (11) looks to shoot past former Miami forward Julian Gamble (45).

Miami hopes to weather youth

By Ben Coley
Staff Writer

In past seasons, Miami coach Jim Larranaga has thrived on experienced teams. In 2006, his George Mason team reached the Final Four with five returning starters. Just two seasons ago, he led Miami to the Sweet Sixteen with six seniors on the roster. But in the 2014-15 season, Larranaga won't be as fortunate.

Junior center Tonye Jekiri and sophomore guard Manu Lecomte are the only returning scholarship players from the 2013-14 team. Miami has nine newcomers, including three freshmen and three eligible transfers.

Larranaga said, with his past experienced teams, the players enter the season with a clear vision and only certain areas need to be tweaked. But this year, Larranaga expects growing pains. "A team that brings in a handful of new players and

has a couple of great freshmen, they may show that they have great talent," Larranaga said. "But if you get into the NCAA Tournament and they don't know anything about the opponent, they could be easily caught off guard and not play their best."

Among the new crop of players is junior guard Sheldon McClellan who transferred from Texas. As a sophomore with the Longhorns during the 2012-13 season, McClellan put up 13.5 points per game and shot 83.3 percent from the free throw line.

For McClellan, sitting out last season was uncomfortable, but he said it gave him time to work on his game.

"It was very frustrating to see my teammates struggle on the court. Me and (Angel Rodriguez) wanted to be out there," McClellan said. "But at that point, we were focusing on ourselves. I definitely got better in my year off — both offensively and defensively. So I looked at it as a positive."

With its two leading scorers gone in guards Rion Brown and Garrius Adams,

Miami will have to find a new source of offense. Returners Jekiri and Lecomte both averaged fewer than 10 points per game last season.

But Rodriguez, a redshirt junior transfer guard from Kansas State, said any player on the team is capable of carrying the offensive mantle in each game.

"I truly think that we have a lot of weapons and that it could be anyone's night," Rodriguez said. "That's one of the beauties of this team. It's an advantage feeling comfortable giving the ball to each other."

To be successful, Larranaga said one player can't carry the load. Instead, there needs to be a strong supporting cast in place to go far in the NCAA Tournament.

"You have to have an NBA first-round pick probably to win it all, but he can't do it by himself," Larranaga said. "One, two or three guys can't do it by themselves. They have to have enough support."

And with so many new faces, Miami will need all the support it can get.

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Wolfpack moves on without Warren



DTH FILE/HALLE SINNOTT
UNC guard Marcus Paige (5) reaches up to block a shot by N.C. State guard Anthony Barber (2) on Feb. 1. UNC won 84-70.

By Danielle Herman
Senior Writer

N.C. State hasn't even started its season, yet the Wolfpack is already talking about loss. It's understandable, considering the team ended its season with an 83-80 overtime loss to St. Louis in the second round of the NCAA Tournament — only to be followed by the loss of its star small forward and the ACC Player of the Year, T.J. Warren, who announced in April he would declare for the draft.

The players know people are already discounting them, saying they can't make an NCAA run without Warren, who led the ACC in scoring last year.

"Our guys, they had a great appreciation for T.J. last year," Coach Mark Gottfried said. "They clearly know that, without him last year, we weren't going to the NCAA Tournament. They get it. Yet now, there's the competitive nature of each guy that says, 'Hey we want to prove to everybody that we can win without that guy.'"

Ralston Turner, a redshirt senior guard, said the team will have to step up together to fill the gap left by Warren. "I think we need to do it as a committee," he said. "T.J. was a great player, in my opinion the best in the country, so he did a lot of great things, but I don't think one person can do what he did."

Gottfried said he thinks the team will play better defensively this year after dismal performances in 2013-14, when the N.C. State was among the worst in the ACC in nearly every defensive category.

Just like a season ago, the

team is young — 10 of its 16 members are underclassmen — and Gottfried said they have struggled with inconsistent play during practice.

"Some days, we think we look great, and then other days we act like we couldn't beat ... Meredith (College)," he said.

At the point guard position, Gottfried said sophomore Anthony "Cat" Barber is still using his speed while becoming a better passer.

"If you remember last year, really in the last month, month and a half, he started to play a lot better," he said. "He was thinking pass first, not score first. He's carried that over."

The Wolfpack has depth at the forward position, with sophomores Kyle Washington, Beejay Anya and Lennard Freeman as well as freshman Abdul-Malik Abu competing for minutes.

Gottfried said the four of them could provide much-needed scoring in the absence of Warren but that none of them have really emerged yet.

"All of us want one to separate from the pack," Washington said. "There's no talk about it, you just have to go out and do it."

In addition to Abu, the Wolfpack added transfer redshirt junior guard Trevor Lacey and freshmen forwards Cody and Caleb Martin to their team, all of whom Gottfried said were playing well. He said Lacey will bring needed leadership to a team with so many underclassmen.

"I think Trevor has the respect of his teammates. Trevor plays the game the right way," Gottfried said. "If the next guy is more open, he's giving it to him every time. That's kind of contagious amongst your team."

And that's the kind of mentality needed for a team that will have to focus more than any other ACC team on playing together without the fallback of a star player.

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DTH FILE/HALLE SINNOTT
UNC guard Nate Britt (0) makes a layup during the game against the N.C. State Wolfpack on Feb. 1, 2014, at the Smith Center.

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Harrell finally gets ACC debut

By Andrew Tie
Staff Writer

In Tarboro, just east of Raleigh, Louisville junior Montrezl Harrell grew up in the backyard of Tobacco Road. The slightly undersized but scrappy power forward on the men's basketball team wasn't highly recruited, particularly by the ACC schools nearby. Harrell initially committed to Virginia Tech, but after Seth Greenberg was fired, he reopened his recruitment and



found a home in Louisville. The Cardinals are the new kid on the block in the conference, replacing Maryland after conference hopping from the Big East and the ACC in the last two years. It's been a long road, but Harrell is finally in the ACC. "Making this conference jump is really nothing new to us, but we know that coming into the ACC, that we've got to be ready to play," Harrell said. "We've got to be ready on any given night because we know this conference is a real powerhouse conference, and on any given night you can get beat." Under Coach Rick Pitino, Harrell has flourished. He averaged 14 points and 8.4 rebounds in a breakout sophomore campaign in the 2013-14 season, providing the thunder to the lightning of now-professional point guard Russ Smith. After helping the Cardinals to the Sweet Sixteen, Harrell flirted with the NBA before returning to Louisville. "I was thinking ... watching practice, without Montrezl Harrell, we may not win five games with this type of schedule," Pitino said. "As you look at our schedule, and you look at how good a first team he is, consensus All-American in the

preseason, it's really important that we have him in our program. It's euphoric to have him suiting up again this year." Expectations are high with Harrell's preseason accolades and the Cardinals' No. 8 preseason ranking. "I really feel that this team has a chance to be special," Harrell said. "We still have a lot of core key group of guys who have been to the Final Fours, to the National Championships, and I feel like if these guys really buy into the Louisville way that Coach P wants us to do, then we really have a chance to be special this year."

However, Pitino is quick to pump the brakes on the optimism despite winning a national title in 2013. "We may be as good as we were those past three years, but I just don't know," Pitino said. "I know our starting five is very good, but then we have six freshmen, and just don't know what to expect from them." In addition to Smith, Louisville will be replacing sharpshooter Luke Hancock. Joining Harrell as leaders for this year's team are senior forward Wayne Blackshear and sophomore guard Terry Rozier. Blackshear said he knows the ACC will be a challenge. "You've got a lot of teams, Hall of Fame coaches, top prospects that go to the NBA," he said. "You can only be excited to play against those guys and just compete. It'll bring the best out of you and your game." Harrell will have the chance to get revenge with the schools that overlooked him, but he's taking a different approach. "I don't take off any game because of the team that we're playing," Harrell said. "I'm looking to play every team and just get out there, honestly."

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A new Buzz arrives in Blacksburg

By Jake Barry
Staff Writer

Will Johnston was driving back from a weekend away when he received an unexpected text message. "Congratulations on your new coach," the Virginia Tech senior guard's cousin wrote. But Johnston, unaware of the new hire, asked who it was. It's Buzz Williams, who takes over the Hokies' program for the 2014-15 season after six seasons as the head coach of Marquette. "I'm just gonna tell 'em the truth," said Williams at the ACC's annual basketball Media Day. "I'm gonna love 'em really hard, I'm gonna coach 'em really hard, and I'm gonna be really hard on 'em off the floor because that's what's gonna last." The family mentality that Williams has established will be necessary for the underdog Hokies as they enter a competitive conference in the ACC that has now added Louisville to the mix. "I knew he coached Marquette," Johnston said. "That's all I knew about him." Little did he know how fast their relationship would grow. "Do you like him?" a reporter asked at ACC Media day in Charlotte. "Yeah I like him," Johnston responded. "He's like my dad." Williams, who led the Golden Eagles to two Sweet 16s and an Elite 8 between



2011 and 2013, brings a fresh level of pedigree to a struggling Virginia Tech squad that went 9-22, 2-16 ACC in 2013-14 under James Johnson. Players have already responded with rave reviews. After a grueling two-week boot camp, the team will try and compensate for its lack of elite ACC talent with physicality and mental toughness. "We didn't touch a basketball for two weeks, but that was his goal. He wanted to see who was tough enough physically and mentally," Johnston said. After the dismal 2013-14 campaign, the media made it clear that it expects more of the same from the Hokies this season as the team was predicted to finish last in the ACC. But with a year at the college level under his belt, Devin Wilson has learned how to compete in the ACC. He will be joined by a pair of exciting top recruits, Ahmed Hill and Justin Bibbs, whose presence already proves Williams' prowess on the trail. The backcourt will also rely on Johnston as a jack of all trades, providing veteran savvy and outside shooting off the bench. The frontcourt will be the Hokies' biggest question heading into the season, with the departure of players like C.J. Barksdale, who averaged 8.1 points a contest last year. The wildcard of this group is junior college transfer Shane Henry, who was the No. 5 ranked JUCO recruit by 247Sports. If Henry can replicate this production at a higher level



DTH FILE/HALLE SINNOTT
UNC forward Brice Johnson shoots in a game against Virginia Tech on March 1, 2014. The Tar Heels beat Virginia Tech 60-56.

of competition, the Hokies could cause fits for the traditional league powers and be a threat going forward. A new beginning, a new Buzz Williams team. "We're not scared of anyone," Johnston said. sports@dailytarheel.com

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